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# Always On: Capitalist Continuity and Its Discontents

## 1. Introduction: Capitalism's Ends and Continuities

**1.1.** Why should we critically reflect on continuity today? To immediately address the central point, it suffices to invoke the issues and standpoints that occupy radical theorists today, such as the direct, impassionate question, When and how will capitalism finally end? Another widespread articulation of the same concern would range from the different obscure claims about "living in the end times," stemming from politico-eschatological perspectives of capitalism's self-destructiveness, to hard evidence of disaster capitalism's devastation and destabilization of the natural world. In a less theoretical but more pointed form, this central concern has been echoed in people's responses to the greedy, cynical warmongering of recent times, new right-wing populist deceptions of the dispossessed masses, and the incredible burgeoning of inequality worldwide. These versions of desperate wondering could be summed up in the question, When will this massive, repetitive absurdity end? Today, this end is imagined in less utopian, inspiring shapes than before, ranging from explosive, unpredictable technological acceleration, random catastrophes, and ecological disaster to more sober discussions about the opportunities for a renewed radical politics.

But before asking questions about the end of capitalism, maybe it would be better to investigate the monstrous continuities that can have no ends. This first hypothesis assumes continuity is an intrinsic feature of modern capitalist ontology, not only an empirical fact of life, like the widely discussed 24/7 society, etc. When engaging with urgent questions about capitalism's possible end, we should first explore capitalism's stubborn, multiple continuities, as well as critique and discuss their potential for political subversion.

**1.2** Certainly, capitalist continuities were unleashed and rendered visible in the monotonous, non-teleological sequence that kicked off after the collapse of communist alternatives in the twentieth century. The so-called end of history was a hypothesis developed in the 1930s by the Russian-French philosopher Alexandre Kojève who, in fact, originally conceived the idea by way of advancing universal communism.[1] However, in the 1990s, overtaken by hegemonic neoliberalism, all alternatives to the capitalist order and its liberal-democratic institutional and ideological framework were considered definitive failures. For the time being, we will ignore the reasonable, well-argued challenges to the end of history in order to explore its relevance for a critical study of capitalist continuity. Kojève's hypothesis, if we abstract the idea from its presumed political allegiances, whether communist or neoliberal, suggests the emergence of a post-historical continuity with no end or goal, as the end has already been eliminated. In this sense, its monotonous formal continuity, purged of teleology, accurately describes the current historical and ontological state of affairs. For Kojève, who derived the idea of post-history from his highly original reading of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, this period would be marked by a circularity of knowledge and modes of behavior: at the end of history,

[1] Alexei Penzin, "Stalin Beyond Stalin? A Paradoxical Hypothesis of Communism by Alexandre Kojève and Boris Groys," *Crisis and Critique* 3, 1 (2016): 300–340.

everything that can be said and done has already been said and done.[2] In my reading of Kojève, which goes against the grain and is dialectical, I suggest we use the idea not only as a metaphor for epistemic exhaustion and the depletion of natural resources. It would be more productive to consider post-historical existence ontologically, as a non-teleological sequence, a period literally without end, a pure continuity foisted on society.

**1.3.** The contemporary empirical evidence suggests this continuity is not absolutely monotonous and consistent; rather, it is chockablock with internal political conflicts, wars, and states of exception. However, according to Walter Benjamin's famous utterance, recently reiterated by Giorgio Agamben, the state of exception has now become permanent or continuous. This sequence is affected by new waves of economic crisis, the excesses of neoconservative and neoliberal politics, and political violence and instability, yet the persistent social ontology of continuity is the key to understanding it. As with the state of exception, other seemingly disruptive phenomena have been recognized as continuous or permanent, too, e.g., economic crises.

Indeed, continuity is present in many parts of the current so-called 24/7 society, whose essential features are not difficult to summarize: the uninterrupted continuity of production, exchange, consumption, communication, and surveillance, and its socio-technical infrastructure, including the internet, social media, incessant social organization, algorithms of nonstop e-commerce, etc.[3] According to a recent article on the effects of big data and our permanent connectivity, the primary purpose of surveillance capitalism is "to link every social activity into a datafied plane, a managed continuity from which value can be generated."[4]

Continuity's economic and technological dimensions have been reiterated in the social rhetoric of the continuous education model, which engages in a nonstop fine-tuning of the labor force in keeping with the flexibility required by the market. It is as efficient as the cultural model of never-ending television series, the overwhelming franchising of the cinema's sequels and prequels, media strategies designed to neutralize breaking events via endlessly repetitive commentary and recurring images, memes, etc. In their time, Adorno and Horkheimer studied the culture industry and its standardization of culture, which ruled out unique, traditional or authentic creativity, producing instead a cultural commodity for popular consumption. Although the so-called culture industry allowed for gaps and informal elements between series or commodified episodes of production, it would now be more appropriate to speak of an almost seamless continuity of cultural production and consumption, enhanced by digital image-capture.

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[2] Alexander Kojéve, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the* Phenomenology of Spirit (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

[3] Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (London & New York: Verso, 2014). The pioneering argument about colonization of the nighttime and society's modern incessancy was made in the 1980s by US sociologist Murray Melbin, *Night as Frontier: Colonizing the World After Dark* (New York: Free Press, 1987).

[4] Nick Couldry, "The Price of Connection: 'Surveillance Capitalism,'" *The Conversation*, September 23, 2016.

**1.4.** Even the most intelligent, politically articulated contemporary art exists today in a permanent flow, as Boris Groys puts it, meaning artworks are no longer distanced from the material everyday world, as modernist or Kantian aesthetics would suggest, and neither are "autonomous" art spaces such as galleries and museums. Rather, art is immersed in a continuous flow of digitized images and the intense global circulation of these images. Focusing on contemporary media and its relationship to the internet in general, Groys does not stress a connection between the fluidity in art's current social existence and the capitalist predicament. However, when he argues that "the material flow is irreversible. […] there remains no way out of the material flow—and thus also no way back, no possibility of return," Groys underlines the difference between the compulsory ontological irreversibility of material flow and the flow of information and digital images relevant to the analysis of the continuity-form we have undertaken here.[5]

To invoke a rather metaphorical description, contemporary capitalism is always turned on, from its permanently plugged-in devices to its numerous institutions and organizations.[6] It generates a continuum that operates smoothly and uninterruptedly, day and night, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. These multiple continuities are heterogeneous and located in different places: large and small, microscopic and macroscopic, they are embedded in socio-economic and technological processes. Since this empirical diversity persists, it would be fitting to construct a general model or form that can be abstracted from the contents it shapes and modulates.

**1.5.** I should emphasize that he continuity-form's massive socio-technological apparatus produces specific types of subjectivity that are forced to adjust to the flow's incessant social and economic activity. Currently, human beings have biological and anthropological limits to engaging in continuous activity, since they need to reproduce their labor power. These contradictory demands—continuity versus reproduction—constitute a double bind that leads to the emergence of a new subjectivity permanently preoccupied with time pressures and trapped in irrational procrastination loops. This behavior is induced by installing 24/7 continuity into human beings through the digital prostheses that enable permanent social presence, work, and involvement—for example, social network accounts, which figure as the ideal of a continually active presence and expose their users to uninterrupted flows of production and communication, engaging them in the attention economy and quasi-participation.

Under the capitalist continuity, in which the difference between work and reproduction has been eroded, damaged life (Adorno's coinage) appears literally as a continuum.

> James no longer sees any difference between his work and personal life, but sees this as a good thing, "It's like a continuum, I just happen to be doing different activities at different times." When he's working he doesn't

[5] Boris Groys, In the Flow (London & New York: Verso, 2016), PAGE NUMBER? -- .P.6
[6] Thanks to Matthew Fuller for suggesting the term "always-on capitalism."

> compromise his playtime and his social time, he says. "It's an extension of that."[7]

The continuity-form's effects are much broader. They cannot be reduced to the widely discussed topic of the blurring of the boundaries between work and life in post-Fordist or so-called cognitive capitalism.[8] They imply a longer historical trajectory within modern capitalism that, as this essay seeks to demonstrate, has been more fundamental.

## 2. Marx: Continuity as a Necessary Condition of Capitalist Production

At this point, the crucial question can be asked. What would constitute a theoretical genealogy of modern capitalism's empirically massive, obsessive continuities? This question should be addressed both by finding theoretical and critical concepts and performing an empirical analysis of modern capitalism's socio-political operations. The central point in this outline of a theoretical genealogy will be the nearly unnoticed discussion of continuity as a condition of capitalist production in several fundamental works by Marx.

**2.1.** To the best of my knowledge, the terms continuity and continuity-form are not found in standard dictionaries of Marxism, neither in the classical French *Dictionnaire Critique du Marxisme* (1985), edited by Gérard Bensussan and Georges Labica, nor in the new German *Historical-Critical Dictionary of Marxism* (2009), edited by Wolfgang Fritz Haug and Joseph Fracchia. This gap in our knowledge should definitely be filled. In his late works on political economy, Marx uses the word continuity with a quite significant emphasis, especially in *Capital* (1867) and other texts related to this project. In the second volume of *Capital*, Marx notes that **"**continuity is the characteristic feature of capitalist production and is required by its technical basis even if it is not always completely attainable."[9] By "technical basis," Marx means the factory's machinery, which, ideally, should run without interruption in order to continue producing value.

The notion of continuity is elaborated at greater length and more rigorously in Marx's earlier draft of *Capital*, the *Grundrisse*, which was completed in 1858 and published in 1939. The noun *Kontinuität* and the adjective *kontinuierlich* are used frequently in the *Grundrisse*, especially in the manuscript sections containing the short subchapters "Continuity of production presupposes suspension of circulation time"[10] and "Fixed capital and continuity of the production process. Machinery and living labor."[11] In these texts, Marx systematically stresses the importance of "the continuity of production processes" (*die Kontinuität des Produktionsprozesses*) in their capitalist

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[7] Quoted in Peter Fleming, The Mythology of Work*:* How Capitalism Persists Despite Itself (London: Pluto Press, 2015), PAGE NUMBER? P. 38

[8] Moulier-Boutang argues that the continuous nature of the working day has to do with the nature of cognitive capitalism itself. Yann Moulier-Boutang, *Cognitive Capitalism* (London: Polity Press, 2012), 154.

[9] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 2, trans. David Fernbach (London: Penguin Classics, 1992), 182.

[10] Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin Classics, 1993), 544–549.

[11] Ibid., 702–705.

mode and outlines three aspects of this continuity.[12] The first two are found in the production and circulation of capital, and they extend and enrich the notes on the continuity of production that briefly surface in the second volume of *Capital*. Marx's argument, however, is more nuanced in the *Grundrisse*, where he claims that the continuity of production can be an "externally compelling condition" in which the reorganization of fixed capital or machinery plays a key role:

> Hence the continuity of production becomes an external necessity for capital with the development of that portion of it which is determined as fixed capital. For circulating capital, an interruption, if it does not last so long as to ruin its use value, is only an interruption in the creation of surplus value. But with fixed capital, the interruption, in so far as in the meantime its use value is necessarily destroyed relatively unproductively, i.e., without replacing itself as value, is the destruction of its original value itself. Hence the continuity of the production process which corresponds to the concept of capital is posited as *conditio sine qua [non]* for its maintenance only with the development of fixed capital; hence likewise the continuity and the constant growth of consumption.[13]

Elsewhere in the *Grundrisse*, Marx makes the same claim more abstractly, presenting it as the value-form's constant metamorphosis.

> The *constant continuity* of the process, the unobstructed and fluid transition of value from one form into the other, or from one phase of the process into the next, appears as a fundamental condition for production based on capital to a much greater degree than for all earlier forms of production.[14]

Therefore, continuity is specific to capitalist production itself, critically distinguishing it from the pre-modern, feudal and ancient social-economic formations. This feature of continuity has definitely intensified now, as the role of machinery in the production of value, including computers and the internet, has become incommensurably more important. As machinery has been increasingly automated and less dependent on living labor, with its "natural" anthropological limitations, causing breakdowns and interruptions in the continuous production process, the continuity-form or always-on capitalism has the potential to become almost absolute.

Marx's third discussion of continuity is no less important. It deals with credit, whose main function is maintaining the continuity of production processes by making money available to them.

> It thus appears as a matter of chance for production based on capital whether or not its essential condition, the continuity of the different processes which constitute its process as a whole, is actually brought about. The suspension of this chance element by capital itself is *credit*.[15]

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[12] Ibid., 719.
[13] Ibid., 719.
[14] Ibid., 535.
[15] Ibid.

Marx goes on to argue that continuity is essential to capitalist production. In earlier modes of production, there was no true credit system, although the acts of lending and borrowing, and the practice of usury were exercised as primordial, "antediluvian forms of capital."[16] The simple acts of lending and borrowing do not amount to credit, however. In capitalist production, credit is necessary to the system, as it secures the continuity of production and avoids all interruptions of value creation.

This sheds light on today's finance capitalism, which, from this perspective, emerged historically as the solution, albeit a temporary one, to the problem of continuity. Continuity has been constantly threatened by crisis, economic uncertainty, chance, and other disruptive factors. These factors can be significantly reduced by multiplying financial instruments, such as derivatives, futures, etc., meant to facilitate the smooth, incessant metamorphosis of value. It also would seem, however, that the role of pure chance in globalized capitalism has been amplified by a strong speculative trend, detached from real production, that can generate autonomous profits in one part of the globe while wreaking havoc and discontinuity in another. Perhaps we should identify the systemic continuity-form as contemporary capitalism's necessary condition or essential ingredient which, as Marx says, is "not always completely attainable." That is, we should regard it as hegemonic, while admitting there are local deviations caused by chance, inevitable contradictions, and the speculative games of finance capitalists. This imposed continuity-form has now been symbolized in countless graphs, curves, diagrams of economic growth and decline, market indexes, etc.[17]

**2.2.** Interpretations of the *Grundrisse* have a long history, starting with Roman Rosdolsky's systematic examination of the manuscript in *The Making of Marx's 'Capital'* (1968). Although Rosdolsky quotes the passage on continuity as a necessary condition without engaging in much interpretation,[18] he makes an important comment on the function of credit and the continuity of production.

> There are, however, moments in the development and life-cycle of capital, which establish not only the possibility, but also the necessity of the credit system; which in fact cause credit to appear as a necessary condition of capitalist production; the chief of these is the striving for continuity, for the uninterrupted flow of the production process.[19]

Rosdolsky also notes this argument on credit and continuity is "clearly still valid today."[20]

Interesting insights on "the necessity of continuity" in capitalist production can be also discovered in Alfred Sohn-Rethel's well-known *Intellectual and Manual Labor* (1978). This book is best known for its provocative reduction of Kant's epistemology to an effect of exchange value and the commodity form, as well as for its pioneering

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[16] Ibid.
[17] Marx's later interest in calculating infinitesimals points to his preoccupation with the problem of formally defining the capitalist continuum.
[18] Roman Rosdolsky, *The Making of Marx's 'Capital,'* trans. Pete Burgess (London: Pluto Press, 1977), 364.
[19] Ibid., 392.
[20] Ibid., 396.

theorization of intellectual labor. The book also elaborates a theory of advanced capitalism in which production takes the form of a production flow. In describing it, Sohn-Rethel quotes the above-mentioned passages from Marx's *Grundrisse*.[21] As he notes,

> The entirety of a workshop or factory is integrated into one continuous process in the service of the rule of speed. […] This continuity is now implemented by a machine, a conveyor belt or other transfer mechanism subjecting to the set speed the action of all the productive machinery and the human labor serving it.[22]

Certainly, continuity tends to be isolated from the overall drift of Marx's theoretical categories and highlighting it might seem to be an exaggeration. However, our goal here, as I explained at the outset, is to do an initial mapping of the concept. I believe this first attempt to explore the motif of continuity in Marx and beyond—pitched as a hypothesis about its strategic significance, and provoked by the social, cultural and political implications of today's always-on capitalism rather than by recent works on value theory—can be fruitful as diagnosis and interpretation, as I will discuss in more detail later.

**2.3.** I should stress the differences between the continuity-form and Marxian concepts that may seem similar, such as reproduction and real subsumption. In the chapter "Simple Reproduction," in the first volume of *Capital*, Marx employs continuity and simple reproduction synonymously, e.g., "the mere continuity of the production process, in other words, simple reproduction."[23] However, as I have pointed out, in the other volumes of *Capital*, as well as in the *Grundrisse*, Marx tends to present continuity as a crucial, independent category.

In this case, reproduction refers to replenishing the labor power and social relations necessary for capitalist production, hence the worker's disciplined, docile subjectivity. This is achieved via family, police, educational institutions, new managerial schemes and methods of exploitation, and the legal institution of private property, which secures control over the means of production. But reproduction is not evidently part of capitalist production's *structural* continuity, whose necessary condition is the centrality of fixed capital and the functionality of credit, which enable the uninterrupted metamorphosis of the value-form. Reproduction thus appears to be a subordinate supplier of continuity, maintaining it in society and individuals, whereas credit maintains it in the realm of finance, while automated machinery does so in the realm of material production. Finally, so-called consumerist society integrates the continuity-form into the world of consumption.

Let us compare the continuity-form with another concept in Marx, society's so-called real subsumption to capital. This condition is usually explained in contrast to an earlier phase of capitalist development, identified as formal subsumption, in which

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[21] Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labor: A Critique of Epistemology* (London: Macmillan, 1978), 142–143.
[22] Ibid, p. 161.
[23] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Classics, 1982), 715.

capitalist production dictated what the worker did only inside the factory. As such, the lives of individuals remained outside of capitalist relations. Real subsumption (sometimes considered the determining condition of modern capitalism) instead programs society and all individuals in order to meet production's tactical and strategic requirements and thus perpetuate the accumulation of value, instigating a degree of control that penetrates even life's most minute details. Indeed, the empirical continuities of today's 24/7 societies are typical of real subsumption. In fact, this is an example of continuity's concealment ~~of continuity~~ by the notion of real subsumption, as it remains a *formal* and abstract state which lacks reference to temporality or permanence. In this sense, continuity—compulsory, uninterrupted value-form metamorphosis—remains the hidden necessary condition of capitalist production, imposed on society as a whole.

To resume outlining my hypothesis, and in keeping with Marx's practice of coining new terms, I would emphasize the way in which the concept of the continuity-form (understood, following the *Grundrisse,* as capitalism's necessary condition) also shapes the "matter" of social life under the capitalist mode of production.

### 3. Aesthetics and the Politics of Continuity—and the Counter-Continuity of Communism

Capitalism has found a way to make the continuity-form efficient and omnipresent, embedded in the incessant flow of production and reproduction, and the control and policing of society.[24] With these developments, the continuity-form functions not only as an abstract concept but also as an operative paradigm of the late-capitalist social order, shaped by its economic conditions, which are, in turn, determined by the predominance of fixed capital (machinery) and a value-form that exists in a permanent state of continuous and uninterrupted metamorphosis. Research on the continuity-form has to be expanded into modernity's subjective and aesthetic dimensions.

In conclusion, I would like to make several brief observations and suggest some directions for completing this investigation.

**3.1.** In his remarkable essay "Photography," written in the 1920s, the German cultural theorist Siegfried Kracauer argued that the crucial difference between photography and previous techniques of representation was not only the reproducibility of image it enabled, something widely discussed by many theorists, starting with Walter Benjamin. Instead, Kracauer argued that photography's specific quality was its management of the visual flow's "continuum," which could not be grasped by our subjective, selective memories or represented in classical artworks.

> Photography grasps what is given as a spatial (or temporal) continuum; memory images retain what is given only insofar as it has significance. […]

[24] One way to describe the transition to capitalism would involving borrowing the mathematical notion of the transition (or, rather, leap) from a series of numbers to a continuous line or curve. Interestingly, the term ultra-continuity has been discussed in modern mathematics. As a line relates to a series of points or numbers in terms of density, so too would ultra-continuity relate to "ordinary" continuity. To further this analogy, we probably see traces of ultra-continuity in today's always-on regime.

> Similarly, from the perspective of memory, photography appears as a jumble that consists partly of garbage."[25]

Taking our inquiry into the continuity paradigm as a point of departure, it is clear that the technological innovation that triggered the emergence of new media, e.g., photography, cinema, video, digital images, and the internet, reflect a demand for the continuous presentation of the social and anthropological experiences generated by late capitalism. The brilliant albeit fragmentary insights of Kracauer and the other theorists who originally registered the emergence of modern media can be reiterated and extended to today's digital media and concomitant cultural practices, which capture a "spatial (or temporal) continuum" in its purest form. Modern recording and monitoring devices such as CCTV cameras and webcams reduce the visual flow produced by everyday life to garbage; they favor a singular image over pure visual flow, the representational counterpart to the universal continuity-form.

**3.2.** Speaking more generally in terms of art and aesthetic theory, and drawing a parallel with the problem discussed here, I would suggest that classical, representational art is based on the sovereign gesture of the artist or writer who samples, interrupts, and transforms everyday life's experiential continuity into a singular artwork, drama or narrative, whose aesthetic autonomy is achieved through detachment from the continuum. This gesture is then interpreted as an expression or symbolization of a specific historical moment, of society and its antagonisms. It is abstracted from the quotidian, as most clearly embodied by certain examples of formalist modern art. Yet the mundane remains essential to the visual objects and texts that present themselves as artworks, since the initial gesture that shaped them involved breaking or, at least, diverting commonplace sensory, visual and verbal flows.

**3.3.** Inspired by the avant-garde, contemporary art has broken with the sovereign gesture of interruption in the same way the capitalist political economy has moved away from the fragile symbolic continuity of pre-modern institutions, now replaced by a Foucauldian continuum of uninterrupted surveillance, and the disciplines and dispositifs of power. The inaugural avant-garde gesture of crossing the frontier between art and life was not only a ~~critical~~, radical response to art's autonomy in bourgeois society[26] or, as Rancière argues, an expression of a new aesthetic regime that introduced radical equality,[27] but also, perhaps, the capitalist continuity-form's intrusion into art and culture.

**3.4.** These considerations immediately raise a properly political question: what would constitute real resistance to the continuity-form? Are the avant-garde's cultural forms merely sophisticated reverberations of the dominant capitalist continuity-form? As a concluding remark, I would suggest briefly looking at resistance to the capitalist continuum and its monotonous pressures, and how it has been critically reflected in

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[25] Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, Mass., & London: Harvard University Press, 1995), 50–51.
[26] Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).
[27] Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (New York: Continuum, 2006).

modern political and cultural practice. Remarkably, despite the continued strengthening of late capitalism's continuity paradigm, revolutionary modes of resistance have emerged, adopting numerous shapes, from interruption and exodus (myths of general strikes, violent disruption, etc.) to dreams of a grand counter-continuity. The latter has been conceived as a permanent revolution or continuity of struggles in the teeth of any and all defeats—as, for example, incarnated in the name of the 1970s radical Italian political organization Lotta Continua ("The Fight Continues").

Communism has been the name for the ultimate, most radical expression of resistance to the imposed continuity of the capitalist value-metamorphosis, promising a different social and even ontological regime. Even the real twentieth-century communisms in some sense suspended the irreversible movement of the value-form. Theirs was a dysfunctional attempt to suspend it or, at least, slow it down, or suggest another continuity, as planned and managed by the whole society, rather than the elemental forces and flows of the free market economy.[28]

**3.4.** An enigmatic anticipation of current counter-continuity politics is audible in the words of Samuel Beckett's narrator in *The Unnamable* (1953), whose main dilemma is how "to go on" (significantly, *continuer* in the French original) despite the utter depletion of strength and the very reasons for going on. Beckett's character can be viewed as a prototype for today's counter-continuity activist, with his enigmatic but non-teleological way of thinking. As he says, "[E]verything will continue automatically, until the order arrives to stop everything."[29]

These passages by Beckett have long been objects of critique. As such, Adorno dedicated a lengthy, dense passage to Beckett's principle in his *Aesthetic Theory*.

> Beckett, indifferent to the ruling cliché of development, views his task as that of moving in an infinitely small space toward what is effectively a dimensionless point. This aesthetic principle of construction, as the principle of *Il faut continuer*, goes beyond stasis; and it goes beyond the dynamic in that it is at the same time a principle of treading water and, as such, a confession of the uselessness of the dynamic. In keeping with this, all constructivistic techniques tend toward stasis. The *telos* of the dynamic of the ever-same is disaster; Beckett's writings look this in the eye. Consciousness recognizes the limitedness of limitless self-sufficient progress as an illusion of the absolute subject, and social labor aesthetically mocks bourgeois pathos once the superfluity of real labor came into reach. The dynamic in artworks is brought to a halt by the hope of the abolition of labor and the threat of a glacial death; both are registered in the dynamic, which is unable to choose on its own. The potential of freedom manifest in it is at the same time denied by the social order, and therefore it is not substantial in art either. That explains the ambivalence of aesthetic construction. Construction is equally able to codify the resignation of the weakened subject and to make absolute alienation the sole concern of art—which once wanted the opposite—as it is able to anticipate a reconciled

[28] See Penzin, "Stalin Beyond Stalin?"
[29] Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable* (New York: Grove Press, 2009), 363.

> condition that would itself be situated beyond static and dynamic. The many interrelations with technocracy give reason to suspect that the principle of construction remains aesthetically obedient to the administered world; but it may terminate in a yet unknown aesthetic form, whose rational organization might point to the abolition of all categories of administration along with their reflexes in art.[30]

How should we interpret this passage? First of all, Adorno opposes *Il faut continuer*, as a cliché of development or bourgeois progress applied to art; it is "an illusion of the absolute subject." The same train of thought observes the uselessness of *telos* or any teleology with respect to *Il faut continuer*, or, in our language, a subjective affirmation of the continuity-form. Adorno associates the principle of *Il faut continuer* with what he calls "construction." It is possibly related to Soviet constructivism, which is never explicitly identified in the *Aesthetic Theory.* Construction is one of the modalities that Adorno sees as contributing to art's autonomy, yet, as it is rationally produced, it risks being interpreted by the administered world. At the same time, aesthetic construction is ambivalent: it is able both to denote the "resignation of the weakened subject" to administrative capitalist rationality and "anticipate a reconciled condition that would itself be situated beyond static and dynamic." As an aesthetic construction, the continuity-form could be disarmed and recoded. What else would we call this condition if not an "aesthetic" communism that anticipates a real social arrangement or "dimensionless point" through which the reign of the continuity-form would be deactivated, appropriated, and repurposed?

In the striking political and aesthetic principle proclaimed by Beckett, we can discern a distant echo of the coming struggles—both non-teleological and, strangely, undefeatable—against the capitalist continuity-form. The emerging radical understanding of the twentieth century's real communisms goes beyond the well-known critiques of their intrinsic negativity and failures. Maybe the bizarre Soviet command economy and its inefficiency were a genuine, early attempt to counterbalance the incessant effectuation of the continuity-form? What would repurpose the incessant ontological-economic machine of capitalism mean, aside from disaster and collapse? Can communism be conceived as a possible ontological alternative to the flow? Assuming the necessary specific political events and struggles do occur, perhaps a future communism will be a project for generating a political, social, and ontological counter-continuity. Or it will be nothing.

[30] Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 224–225.